

BLOGGER'S ROUNDTABLE TELECONFERENCE BRIEFING WITH GENERAL  
WILLIAM CALDWELL, SPOKESMAN, MULTINATIONAL FORCE-IRAQ

LOCATION: TELEPHONE

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.STX

Q: General Caldwell, good to have you this morning. I asked a question about -- to describe the job of deputy chief of staff for strategic effects. I know that you're a spokesman and you're engaged in strategic communication, but I wanted to hear a little bit more about how you interface with economic development and the Iraqi national reconciliation program.

GEN. CALDWELL: Okay. Obviously, a portion of our organization, just like you said, the strategic communications, a pretty big chunk, about two-thirds of us of the 150 are focused there. Then the other remaining group is focused and working economic, political and national reconciliation issues. And what we've done there is we work on committees with the government of Iraq, where they have people working the reconciliation, the DDR issues associated, which eventually, hopefully, we'll see occur.

Our economic people, there's a portion that help maintain transparency and coordination across the U.S. embassy, the IRMO -- you know, our Reconstruction Management Office, and also what we call our Gulf Region Division, our GRD, our Corps of Engineers, and then our JCCI, our Joint contracting office, too. And we help facilitate and maintain a situation where we're in coordination between all those so that they're working together as they move forward on different projects and operations.

So day to day and within the Office of National Reconciliation, we've got a sub-element that's called Engagements. We've broken that further down to Sunni engagements, Shi'a engagements and Kurd engagements. And we have another office within there that works Provincial Reconstruction Teams and all the other associated issues of DDR, like amnesty and those type issues.

And so any given day of the week, you're going to find us doing a lot of engagements. I mean in the last two or three months from when I arrived here about 10 months ago, the amount of engagements we do out talking to insurgent elements, groups of people, different entities, religious groups, organizations, has increased just dramatically, I mean to the point where we've quadrupled the number of people we have associated with doing that because of the volume of what we do, and then added a lot more intelligence personnel too so that we can keep track of and tabulate and cross-

reference and share information between all the different organizations of the U.S. government.

I don't know if that helps, if that kind of starts painting the picture.

Q: You act as an information nexus, then, between various efforts both within the U.S. embassy and the Iraqi government to see who's being contacted? And do you deal with subject matter in the reconciliation process?

GEN. CALDWELL: We do. And we --

Q Could you give me an example?

GEN. CALDWELL: We have helped the government of Iraq put together an entire DDR program that does -- they have not started yet to implement. They've got to reach that point where groups are ready to reconcile. But, you know, we worked real hard with them to help make sure they had money in this 2007 budget towards the whole DDR. But we've been pulling out parts and pieces of it and working through USAID and others to start implementing it now from the vocational-technical training institutions that we've stood up, about seven of them now.

And we're working to get some more up to where we can take people off the street, young men, especially, and put them into these different programs, to give them skill sets and then match it up with the state-owned enterprises that we're trying to get stood up that require certain skill sets so that there's a relationship there between all these different activities so that then they can go through the vo-tech training and have a skill set that's now required in one of these large state-owned enterprises that we've been recently just getting back up on their feet, and put these people back to work in long-term job programs so that we have job creation going on.

Q: Could you give me an example of a state-owned enterprise you're trying to reconstruct?

GEN. CALDWELL: Like we've just recently helped -- down in Najaf we have a textile state-owned enterprise that was, you know, not producing anything. And we went down there, did an assessment of it -- oh, gosh, I want to say probably five, six months ago now -- figured out what was required, worked with them to get the machinery back up and fully operational, identifying the people to bring back to work, getting the funding. And then the most important part that we're really finding now is then getting it a market for their product or getting it the requirements levying on it for its product.

And the most recent one we did is this state-owned enterprise, this textile industry down in Najaf, just competed for and won a \$444 million contract to produce the Iraqi army uniform. What we were doing is really contracting out of county so much stuff that we have come to the realization to meet that internally. We've gone through our PX System here in the country, our Post Exchange System, and are working very hard to see

what are those things that are being carried in the PXs that some of these industries within the country could produce that we could then sell to the PX System, which -- it's a major win-win. We don't have to then do all the transportation and movement from outside of country into country, it reduces the amount of vehicles on the roads and allows the Iraqis to get back up with a product that we need, whether it be -- one we're looking at now is plastic water bottles, you know, because we produce so much bottled water requirements over here that -- we've got the water purification systems now pretty much in place and we can produce the water. It's now putting it into the little bottles, but the bottles are bought from out of country, so now we're trying to buy them from within country to include the caps and all that other thing and then set up a system where we can do that in country here. And just a lot like that.

But it takes a lot of coordination amongst all these different organizations and entities that we really help facilitate bringing everybody together to sit down and have these discussions and identify requirements and capabilities and needs and matching the two together and then helping push that along till it takes hold and it starts moving.

STAFF: All right, very good.

Steve, do you have --

Q: (Inaudible) -- Jack (sp), are you there?

STAFF: Yes. Steve with Threatswatch..

Q: Yes -- no, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. This is Scott Kesterson. I wanted to make sure you knew I was in on the conference.

STAFF: Ah, very good. Glad to have you, Scott.

Q: Thank you very much.

STAFF: Okay, Steve, with Threatswatch, do you have a question for General Caldwell?

Q: Yes, sir. General Caldwell, good morning, sir.

GEN. CALDWELL: Good morning.

Q: News broke last night or at some point yesterday that al-Sadr apparently has gone to Tehran yet again, and there are reports that he's been there for some weeks now. I think I read somewhere that he was -- we believe that he's been there for three weeks. And someone -- I believe it was you, General Caldwell -- made the point clear that he (regularly treks ?) from Tehran back to Iraq. Is three weeks a rather extended stay, based on our knowledge?

GEN. CALDWELL: (Chuckles.) Well, I really think the person that was saying he goes back to Iran a lot was one of the reporters that was in the room. She was making that statement; we really didn't come out and make that, and -- what we did say is, yes, Sadr is definitely not in Iraq. He is out of the country right now. All indications are he is in fact in Iran, and we know that he went there last month. He's been out of country since last month.

So all that we know. And we did acknowledge that we also watch his movements pretty closely and what he's doing. So -- but we publicly really didn't -- they were -- been asking the questions about what does that mean, and we just said, well, at that point, that's not something we're going to publicly talk about at this point; although I know there's a tremendous amount of speculation out there as to what it all means. But that's just something we weren't going to talk about right now.

Q Okay. Fair enough. I have a question for you regarding the weapons that we're still gathering that --

GEN. CALDWELL: Okay.

Q -- have come from Iran. One of the frustrating things in observing this is when the military in the field is gathering these weapons and gathering information that indicates that they come from Iran is -- first, the argument was whether or not the weapons were coming from Iran. Now that that's been ceded, now the argument seems to be muddled in, well, can it be pointed back to the regime.

And last week, the discussion was that possibly Qods Force was operating as rogue elements, not connected with the regime, without any knowledge of the regime. And now this week after the weekend display of various weapons from Tehran to the group of reporters -- I believe it was Sunday morning -- the characterization that showed up in an embassy news report was that these elements -- these weapons were displayed -- were displayed -- were provided to rogue elements of the Mahdi Army.

And the frustration, at least on my end and I'm sure it is on your end, is that there seems to be an unwillingness among certain circles to actually hold anyone actually accountable, other than our soldiers and Marines and sailors and air men that end up dead on the battlefield.

And I was wondering if you could shed any light on whether we believe -- who we believe these are being shipped to, and -- well, I'll just leave it at that.

GEN. CALDWELL: Well, here's something we do know; that if these were just random black-market activities that were going on, we would expect to see these Iranian weapons and munitions around the country here in Iraq, and we don't find that. What we find is that Shi'a extremist groups are the ones that in fact we find in possession of these weapons and munitions. That in itself tells us it's not a random black-market activity, but rather it's a more deliberate, conscious plan.

And when you look at the Iraqis and the Iranians, especially the Iranians that we've picked up in the last 60 to 90 days and are going through debriefings with, they've actually admitted that, you know, they know -- and we know, you know, the latest five that we picked up are all Qods Force members -- they know that the weaponry and munitions are being smuggled from Iran into Iraq. I mean, they've admitted -- we have some of them admitting to that. They do talk about extremist group members who are responsible for working the smuggling, but that the Qods Force, you know, supports these extreme elements by supplying them with money and training, training both in-country, here in Iraq, they say, and especially in Iran.

And so we know there's a clear connection between some extremist elements here, which appear all to be Shi'a extremist elements, and the Qods Force elements that operate both in this country and, of course, in Iran.

STAFF: Okay. David Axe (sp).

Q Thanks a lot. We have Major Webber still here with the EOD specialist?

GEN. CALDWELL: I have him. You want me to put him on?

Q Well, I mean, I don't know. I was going to ask a sort of broader question about IEDs.

GEN. CALDWELL: I've got Marty right here, though, if you want me to put him on.

Q Okay. Well, General Caldwell, I don't know if you wanted to field this or hand it off to Major Webber, but --

GEN. CALDWELL: Okay.

Q -- I wanted to just ask a broader question about the IED fight and get an update on how that's going, beyond the shape charge warheads, but IEDs in general.

GEN. CALDWELL: Okay. An IED in general question. Okay. How's it going?

Q Yeah. How's -- I mean, you know, give me an update on --

GEN. CALDWELL: All right. Let me let me let Marty take it --

Q Okay.

GEN. CALDWELL: -- and then if I have some more, I'll pile on top right behind him.

Q All right.

MAJ. MARTY WEBBER: (explosive ordnance disposal expert): This is Major Marty Webber.

Q Hi. This is David Axe (sp). I just wanted to ask a general question about how the IED fight is going, get an update on any trends or beyond just the shape charge thing that we're seeing from Iran.

MAJ. WEBBER: Okay. The IED fight is a real challenge. We have a lot of our EOD teams out there working very hard every day, encountering this stuff on the roads, along with our other coalition partners and our maneuver elements as well.

The caches that we're coming across, which of course -- you know, we showed through these two press conferences some of the items that we've been seeing and recovering -- yes, the EFPs, the explosively formed penetrators, are a real challenge for us. And we're working very hard as part of a -- you know, as we come across them, to render them safe, so that we can exploit them and hopefully start attacking the IED network itself and start dismantling it in some parts and pieces -- but our EOD (detection ?) working very hard every day out there, trying to attack this whole problem, and I think they're doing a hell of a job.

Q How do you render an EFP, one of these multiple EFP IEDs, safe? What's the -- can you give us a little bit of the technical or tactical procedure that your teams go through?

MAJ. WEBBER: Actually, sir, I really can't comment on that, because it does go into our technical -- you know, TTPs and --

Q Okay.

MAJ. WEBBER: I can say that we use -- we have a variety of methods that we can use to attack, Most of them, I will say, are remote in nature. In that way, we can safeguard our operators as much as possible.

But we do have some specific tools and some techniques that we use, and they work very well when we actually find them.

Q May I ask one follow-up on that? And I am not going to try to get into TTPs with this, but do you use robotics?

MAJ. WEBBER: Yes, sir, we do. We use robotics extensively here.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MAJ. WEBBER: Yes, sir.

STAFF: All right. And Scott, Scott Kesterson --

Q Yeah.

STAFF: -- do you have a question?

Q Well, it's actually more -- if I could just -- if I can just comment a little bit on what General Caldwell was saying about the -- dealing with Iran, we have a parallel, as I - - I mean, I guess I should say I've been an embed here in Afghanistan since last May, and that parallel -- as more of a comment to his point, and kind reinforcing that piece -- that the parallel here with Pakistan is almost exact; that the soldiers are ultimately kind of put on the spotlight to justify what goes on.

And we have such a strong influx from Pakistan over here -- I realize this is not directly related to your Iraqi issue, but I think it's a very interesting parallel, because the Pakistan issue is Pakistan and ISI are definitely a contributor and a major funder for the Taliban. I mean, I -- sorry for being a little bit late to your conference. We just finished an operation today where we lost one Afghan soldier and captured three Taliban, killed one and captured 18 motorcycles. And so -- and a small cache.

Still -- the gist or the point -- the parallel is very much there, and in justifying that and allowing and getting that message out and creating that in a circumstance where it becomes more foundational for the public to understand is probably one of the biggest challenges. And that's just kind of my comment to that.

STAFF: Okay.

Charlie?

Q Yeah. I have question related to that. From some people's perspective that we hear in the media, they're saying what's different about Iran getting involved in Iraq or Pakistan getting involved in Afghanistan, and our involvement in the Afghan war against Russia back in the '60s, '70s -- I guess it was '70s and '80s. How do you respond to a comparison where we were doing just as bad as they were doing?

GEN. CALDWELL: I guess what I'd tell you is here in Iraq what you have is a democratically elected government; you have the people who went to the polls and elected the officials that today are running this country. I mean, this is an elected government, it's not one that came in and took over by force, it's not one that's ruling by an iron fist and iron hand, but rather, one that was democratically elected. And you've got the United Nations, who has put out a United Nations Security Council resolution that has a mandate that allows the coalition forces to be here operating in support of this duly elected government on behalf of the Iraqi people.

So, when all is said, you get somebody like Iran, who starts allowing munitions and weaponry and training of extremist elements in their country to come back into this country, then you really -- it's a whole different situation than what you see there years ago that occurred in Afghanistan. I just don't buy -- I mean, I think it's night and day difference, personally, between the two.

Q Well, I would agree with you. But I'm just telling you what we hear in the media. Listening to the news conference you held on February 7th, Michael Ware of CNN talking about how terrible things were, and all the other reporters saying, "Boy, you've made a real complete mess of this, why can we trust you now?"

I admire your ability to stand up and provide excellent responses to these questions. Outstanding. I listen to every one of your press conferences -- podcasted.

GEN. CALDWELL: Well, thanks. I can tell you, there is -- obviously, you know, we do see the skepticism out there that exists because, you know, here -- some feel like, "Okay, here we go again."

But, you know, having been here through the two previous iterations, when we realized that we had a rising level of attacks and casualties occurring since February of last year to February of this year, it's been on the rise continually now for 12 months, you know, with some dips each time we've tried the Baghdad security plan, never before did we put forward, though, the effort by the -- did we see this governmental commitment. I mean, I know I've said that before, but my gosh, it has just so struck me as I have sat here being so involved in dealing with the government of Iraq in almost daily meetings with either the national security adviser, Dr. Rubeia, or some other senior member of the government, and having the ability to talk and listen to see where they are now from where they were 10 months ago. It's truly an infant government, but I've been able to sit here and watch this thing grow. I've seen it take on a great resiliency, become much more assertive, much more determined.

And although I'm guardedly optimistic, you know, the potential exists for them to be successful this time. They've committed the monies, they've committed the political will, they're committing the forces. Just the fact that the Iraqi security forces are now able, where they could not -- I mean literally battalions disintegrated last year, around the July/August time frame when we tried to move them from around the country into Baghdad, we just were unable to do so because, one, we never built them to move, which we've been working to correct and will continue to work on. But two, the soldiers' mentality was not one that was an expeditionary mind set but, rather, a home guard, to where now where we have them more ready to move. We just moved a battalion from the 10th Iraqi Army Division up to (Nulidya ?) where we're going through a little bit of training before they come into the city. It's coming in at a strength of 720, approximately, soldiers. I mean, it's almost 100 percent strength. It's just incredible. I mean, it's probably the most shining example we've seen here recently of the difference that's occurring from last July/August to now. Some of the other battalions that have come in did not come at that strength levels, but they are working to get the follow-on



people down here. And so by the middle of March, we should have three full equivalent Iraqi brigades operating in the city, which should bring up their strength considerably.

STAFF: All right. Cindy, do you have a question for General Caldwell?

Q Yes, I do, and it's going to be a little bit different than the rest of these guys.

In light of the contractor shooting up at Anaconda and having been there as a truck driver myself, I was just kind of curious if you could give us any more details than what we've gotten lately? And are you all implementing any changes in procedure in entering and exiting camps?

GEN. CALDWELL: You know, I'd have to go back and look at the exact procedures. I can tell you that the whole "escalation of force," as they call it, issue is constantly looked at and reviewed. And every single morning we talk about, you know, the incidents that have -- that they have had happen, you know, all around the country. But General Petraeus, over the last two, three days he's been here, you know, in talks about how critical it is to use proportional force instead of this -- you know, it is our rules of engagement that we want to be real careful that -- truly, you know, if a soldier's life's really thought to be at risk and nobody's heeding the warning, then that's when they can, you know, resort to whatever means they need to protect their lives.

But he really grilled people -- has been grilling people, asking, okay, well, tell me about your barrier plan. Does your barrier plan directly ensure that nobody could possibly do this? Tell me about the signs you've got up. Tell me about the lighting system you have. Does it blind them in their eyes because the way you've, you know, set the lights up. So he's really grilling people that he wants them to be sure that we have put procedures in place, and the placement of our systems out there -- our barriers, our lighting, our traffic patterns, our signs -- so that we can almost preclude that from happening. So when it really does happen, when force is used, he can almost be guaranteed it was somebody who was, you know, trying to be suicidal in nature.

But that's the good approach he's taken into it. It's really sound. Instead of just asking, okay, what happened? Well, this truck got here, and it drove over here, and the troops feel threatened. He merely says, okay, well, what barriers did you have in place to preclude that from happening? Well, we had this. Well, have you gone back and looked at the pattern? Do we need to readjust it? Well, I don't know. Well, was the driver blinded? I mean, he's -- so he's really grilling down which I think are very sound questions to ask, that we probably should go back and ask each time sometimes like that.

Q That's great.

STAFF: Okay. And Mark, Mark Finkelstein.

Q Yes. Good morning, General Caldwell.

I had the pleasure of participating in a similar conference call with you back on November 2nd, just before I took off for an embed. And you -- I went back and looked at the article I wrote at the time, and you said something at that time that I think touches upon something that's cropped up just in the last few days. And that has to do with an apparent discrepancy going back to this issue of Iranian weapons coming to Iraq.

On the one hand, the White House seems to have fairly definitively pointed towards the highest levels of the Iranian government's responsibility. And then we had General Pace saying that he has not seen evidence that the Iranian government clearly knows or is complicit. And then we had Admiral Fallon saying that he was not sure who may actually have hands-on on this stuff.

I went back and looked again at that November 2nd article that I wrote. And I wrote at that time, General Caldwell described Iran as being, quote, "unhelpful, particularly in terms of supplying weapons to Shi'ite elements in Iraq." So I wonder, could you shed some light on what is apparently a little bit of a discrepancy here?

GEN. CALDWELL: Well, I did. I tried to cover just now, too -- and when we did the press conference -- you know, General Pace and what we said here Sunday at our backgrounder and what we have said before is somewhat fairly consistent in the sense that, I mean, we're saying the same thing, that there is this ill evidence -- I mean, we really have it -- of Iranian munitions, especially these explosively formed penetrators, the EFPs, being supplied to extremist groups here in Iraq. I mean, that's a fact.

We also know that -- we've picked up Iranian Qods Force officers. And since, as General Pace said the other day, as an absolute minimum, they're here in Iraq illegally, and we're going through a lot of the documentation that we picked up with them -- you know, it's called the DOCEX, the Document Exploitation -- and looking to see what they were attempting to do and -- so that we can share that, too, so people have a better feel for just how unhelpful the Qods Force are being here in allowing the Iraqi people to determine their destiny but rather are trying to influence future events and activities and perhaps even further be associated with illegal -- I mean, for more direct illegal activities.

But Pace did also -- General Pace also did say we know that the explosively formed -- and he used the word "projectiles"; we really call them penetrators -- are manufactured in Iran. So that's the same thing we've been saying, too. And then what happened was we had a military analyst -- an intel analyst who talked about the fact -- he was being questioned, well, who controls Qods Force? And in that discussions, Qods Force are controlled, as he explains, by the highest levels within the Iranian government. And so the inference was then trying to be made that therefore, there's a direct connection.

And my point, as I try to tell the press people today, is, look, we did that briefing on Sunday because of force protection issues. We absolutely know that Iran is allowing these precision-made EFP components to be made in Iran and smuggled here into Iraq and being used here to kill American soldiers, coalition soldiers. We also know that the

munitions they're smuggling in, like 81 mortar rounds, you know, are being used by insurgent groups to just lob mortars and kill innocent civilians, and we know that because we find the tailfins after these mortar attacks. And we find them on our FOBs, too. And they're of Iranian origin because, you know, Iran is the only one, really, in this region who makes the 81 mortar round, especially, you know -- and it's very unique because the tailfin doesn't screw off like it does on ours and most others.

So what General Pace said and we said is very true about the munitions, the Qods Force activity, the unhelpfulness by Iran in these endeavors, and we came out, you know, concerned about the fact that these things are coming in and they're killing coalition forces and Iraqi security forces. And that despite past efforts both politically and some military efforts to deter Iran from doing this, that's been unsuccessful, and so we had a meeting. It was an incredible discussion that went on ahead of time of whether or not we would come out publicly and acknowledge the existence of and the lethality of these EFPs. And it was a tough decision, but by the sheer fact that we had our highest numbers ever in November, December and January -- in November and December of 2006 and January of this year, those are our three highest months of finding EFP or what we call EFP events. Some are fired off, some we find -- what an event is when there's one that either went off or we found. We had the highest number of EFP events ever that we said we're going to go public and talk about this and acknowledge it, because it now becomes a major force protection issue.

You know, again, as I stated in the press conference today, I'm -- as the Multinational Force spokesman, we didn't come out to establish the intent behind it or establish connections (done ?), you know, but rather to say, we know that it is occurring from Iran and we need these actions to stop.

It's all about the actions. It's not about the intent. It's the effect that they're creating here by the killing of our men and women in uniform; you know, just over 170 in the last two years with, obviously, such a preponderance recently that that's where most -- you can start drawing the inference that that's probably where the greatest number of casualties occur too.

Q General Caldwell, can I follow that up with a question?

GEN. CALDWELL: Sure.

Q Yes. This is Bill Roggio. I -- really it's a two-part question. You mentioned that 170 were killed and over 200 wounded. Are these all Shi'a --

GEN. CALDWELL: Over 620 wounded.

Q Six-hundred and twenty, my apologies.

GEN. CALDWELL: No, that's all right. I just wanted make sure you had the right data.

Q Roger that. Are all of these Shi'a-deployed EFPs? And the second part there is: Are you aware of the report of the Steyr .50-cal sniper -- Austrian-made sniper rifles? Do you have any comment on the validity of that report?

GEN. CALDWELL: On the .50-cal rifles, yeah. Yeah, we know they're Austrian-made. We have found those here in Iraq. That is a valid -- that is correct that we have found some of those here in Iraq.

Q And how about the -- on the EFPs? Are these all Shi'a-deployed?

GEN. CALDWELL: The EFPs -- we have found the EFPs predominantly used -- (to Gen. Stroud or Major Webber) -- would you say in Shi'a areas? Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, they've been predominantly used in Shi'a-dominate areas.

Q Do you have any evidence that these weapons are being supplied to al Qaeda and Ansar al-Sunna?

GEN. CALDWELL: (Speaking aside) -- AAS or AQI? Any evidence that they've been supplied to them?

Yeah, none at all at this point that -- and I mean, it's -- I'm not seeing anything like that, no.

Q Okay. Thank you.

GEN. CALDWELL: I've seen reports like that.

JACK HOLT: All right, sir. General Caldwell, this is Jack Holt again. We're about out of time here.

Do you have any closing comments, sir?

GEN. CALDWELL: No, I just -- you know, everybody who's been sitting there listening to this debate that started in Washington, I know -- and people tend to ask us -- well, you know, how's that affecting the morale over here? -- is a question I tend to be asked some reporters. And I keep telling them and saying, listen, our troops know what's at stake here in Iraq, and they also know that the American public fully supports their efforts here.

You know, they're doing their mission, performing what they've been asked to do by our government. And the thing that our troops need most is the continued support of the American people. That's really key. You know, that's what the American people -- that's the part they can do, is to continue to support these men and women and civilians that are over here working, and ensure also that the resources needed to accomplish this mission are available to them.

So that's two things; that we just need the continued support of the American people, and we just need to ensure that the resources are there that they require to accomplish their missions that are asked of them.

Q All right, sir.

GEN. CALDWELL: Okay, well listen, I just want to tell you all, if I could, to you, thanks for what you all do. I've just been amazed -- I had no idea 10 months ago what an incredible, you know, addition you all are to helping tell what's going on, ensuring the message and providing information out there. But you're an incredibly important news medium that, from what I've seen, has just grown in importance from last May time frame till now, and I think will only continue to do so in the future. So thanks much for what you do.

Q Thank you, General.

GEN. CALDWELL: All right, thank you.

Q Thanks for making your time available to us, sir.

GEN. CALDWELL: Oh, no. Well thank you all for coming on.

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